

# 1 Introduction



## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

### 1.1.1 DESCRIPTION

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® (ABDSP or “the Park”) is an outstanding desert park. It was designated in 1974 as a National Natural Landmark. In 1985 the Park was named a member of the International Biosphere Reserve Program by the United Nations in recognition of its stature as an internationally significant conservation area. With over 600,000 acres, it is among the largest state parks in the United States. ABDSP also holds the distinction of containing the largest area of State Wilderness in California, with 404,000 acres set aside, unimpaired for all generations. Two National Trails: the *Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail* and the *Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail*, traverse the Park’s vastness, while providing visitor access and perspective to the landscape.



The early conservationists who sought to bring protected status to the natural and cultural treasures of the desert lands would be proud today to see their vision realized. Where their original concern was for two or three threatened palm groves, today some thirty native palm oases are now embraced in the desert park they envisioned. The Park’s diversity is one of its true treasures. From a maximum height of 6,193 feet on the crest of the Peninsular Ranges, down through pines, oaks, sycamores, cottonwoods, and palms, the landscape spreads out into vast alluvial fans, scoured and tortured badlands, and shimmering playas only 15 feet above sea level.



Newly acquired Lucky 5 Ranch Property, connecting ABDSP & Cuyamaca Rancho SP



Entrance to Fish Creek area

The seemingly unending expanses of landscape are home to an amazing variety of plant and animal species. Almost 300 species of birds have been documented residing or migrating through the Park’s varied habitats. The Park preserves more than half of

the critical habitat of the endangered Peninsular Bighorn Sheep. New species of insects and other invertebrates are often discovered by visiting scientists; a newly described lizard species is known only from ABDSP. Previously unknown species

of fossil mammals have recently been recovered from the layered sediments of the badlands.

Untold numbers and varieties of cultural sites and features are preserved within ABDSP, and efforts are underway to record, map, and understand these remnants of past cultures. From the earliest arrival of humans perhaps five to seven thousand years ago, to the trails of cowboys, and the temporary training camps of World War II soldiers, this slowly changing desert landscape holds many stories of human history. Ancient trails and village sites of Native Americans such as the Cahuilla and the Kumeyaay are prolific throughout the Park and, over time, are being studied by archaeologists and trained volunteers.

As civilization advances on California's wild lands, and many diverse habitats are brought into protected status, it becomes clear that parks such as ABDSP are not only vital reserves for wildlife and plant communities, but are refuges for humanity as well. The swelling metropolitan areas of southern California and northern Baja California bring more than 20 million people to ABDSP's doorstep. The unique recreational and inspirational qualities of the desert are increasingly popular and sought after. The 500 miles of primitive roadways and the opportunity to camp throughout the backcountry, as well as to hike or ride miles of mountainous trails, bring visitors into the realm of a parkland that early visionaries sought to keep whole. The treasured palm oases and desert lands, once thought to be threatened, are now held in trust by one of the greatest parks in the world.

### **1.1.2 LOCATION**

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® reaches from the heights of the Peninsular Ranges in eastern San Diego County to the desert floor on the western edge of Imperial County. In the north, it stretches into Riverside County, and in the south, its boundaries come to within a few miles of the U.S.–Mexico international border. It covers approximately half of the area between the latitudes of 115°57' east and 116°36' west and between the longitudes of 32°37' south and 33°30' north.

Two major east–west highway routes and one north–south route intersect the Park. In the north, County Route S22 crosses from Ranchita to Salton City. State Highway 78 bisects the Park from Julian to Ocotillo Wells. County Route S2 snakes through the Park from the town of Ocotillo in the south and exits the Park north of State Highway 78 at Scissors Crossing. Major highways from which the Park may be accessed include Interstate 15 in the west, Interstate 8 in the south, and State Highway 86 in the east.



The Park entirely surrounds the unincorporated communities of Borrego Springs, and Shelter Valley and borders residential areas in Ocotillo Wells, Ranchita, Anza, and Canebrake. It shares a common boundary with Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area on the east, and is adjacent to a combination of public and private lands along its exterior border. (See “Location Map” page vii.)

### **1.1.3 PURPOSE ACQUIRED**

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park’s® purpose statement, as follows, was proclaimed by the State Park Commission and adopted by the State Park Director on March 20, 1964:

*“...to make available to the people forever, for their inspiration, enlightenment, and enjoyment, a spacious example of the plains, hills, and mountains of the Western Colorado Desert, embracing extensive zones of unimpaired natural integrity, and representing all the varied scenic, historic, scientific, and recreational resources of the region.”*

The idea of a large desert park in San Diego County began in September 1927 when Clinton Abbott, Guy Fleming, and Dr. Walter Swingle appealed to Californians to protect the unique native palm groves in what is now Borrego Palm Canyon. From this early call, the park idea gained support from the San Diego Natural History Museum, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, and the newly formed California State Park Commission. In 1932, in the worst of economic times, funding was generated, mostly through private donations, and the park idea turned into reality. Seventy years later, the Park is comprised of over 600,000 acres of diverse desert and mountain terrain.

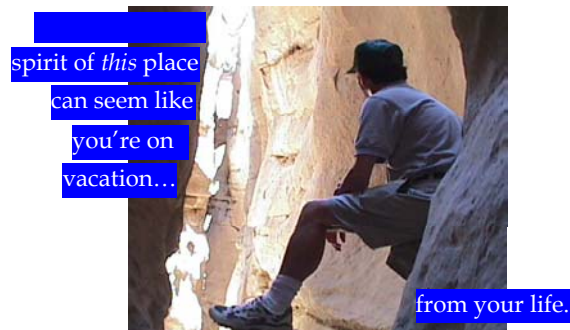
### **1.1.4 SPIRIT OF PLACE**

Desert lands have long cast a spell on humanity. Many are the stories of people venturing far out into an uncharted desert for months or even years, only to return with wisdom and clarity. At least three of the world’s great religions trace their origins to people of the desert. The spirits of the deep shadowy canyons of the Carrizo Badlands, the pinyon-clad ridges of the Santa Rosa Mountains, and the glistening heat waves of Clark Dry Lake have cast their spells on millions of visitors to ABDSP.

Countless desert folk speak of being “addicted” to the desert realm, knowing full well the spell has been cast upon them. They know they must return to the land of warm winds, deep infinite skies, and boundless views; land which is at once subtle *and* harsh. Where one is bombarded by light and suffocated by heat, yet nurtured by the gentle rustling of palm fronds, and the cooling waters of a shaded pool. The spirit of the place swirls around and fills each visitor willing to let it in.

ABDSP holds in all of its vastness and diversity, the spirit of the unknown, of exploration and adventure, of childhood fantasy, of danger and death, of respect and inner tranquility. For each visitor to the desert there is a unique “reason” or relationship. Each individual holds dear their thoughts for the desert land, seemingly unable to fully elaborate on the deep, inner workings of the relationship. “Why do you love the desert?”, “How can you love the desert?”, or “What do you do out there?” are questions often asked by those who have not yet fallen under the spell. Given an open mind, a kind introduction, and time, lots of time, they too may fall into a lifetime relationship with the arid land.

ABDSP stands as a protected desert land, where the spirit of place will be held in trust forever, for its own sake, and for the sake of generations of visitors yet unborn. Whether the Park is experienced during a quiet walk through a forest of ocotillos, meditation upon a weathered boulder, a drive along a lonely road, or on a guided wildflower tour, each visitor takes in its essence in his or her own personal way, to carry forever. The Park means many things to many people, but the one constant is that, with caring and protection, the Park will be here forever, whole and preserved. The “Spirit of Place” is an elusive intangible – the goal that those of us drawn in by it continue to seek. For many of us, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park®, is our Place of Spirit.



spirit of *this* place  
can seem like  
you're on  
vacation...

from your life.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF GENERAL PLANS**

General Plans are broad policy documents intended to guide park development and management for many decades. For a unit of the State Park system, law requires completion of a general plan, prior to permanent park development. Although in existence since 1933, ABDSP has never had a general plan. Nevertheless, the Park has functioned well, partly because of insightful management, and because the facilities were originally well placed in relationship to access and transportation routes.

This document does not attempt to provide detailed management recommendations, but rather provides conceptual parameters for future management actions. General planning provides an opportunity to assess a park's resource stewardship and interpretation, regional significance, facilities development, and recreational opportunities. It provides guidelines for future land use management within a park, including land acquisitions and the facilities required to accommodate an expected visitation increase. Between 1980 and 2000, California's population increased from 24 million to 34 million, and is projected to reach 46 million by the year 2020. The General Plan process includes public participation with the goal of forging stronger and more effective links with local citizenry.

Numerous circumstances have combined to spur preparation of this General Plan. These include increasing pressures on the Park's sensitive plant and animal species, the need to identify and properly protect cultural resources, and the realization that growing human impacts will continue to play a role in the future of the Park.

The General Plan serves as a first-tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as defined in Section 15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The analysis of broad potential environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Analysis Section of this document will provide the basis for future second-level environmental review, which will provide more detailed information and analysis for site-specific developments and projects.